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PROGRESS IN FOREST CONSERVATION

Radio talk by R. F. Hammatt,  
Assistant to the Chief of the Forest Service, U.S. Department  
of Agriculture. On the National Farm and Home Hour, Friday,  
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The good earth offers us its soils and waters, and they yield plant and animal life. But man cannot conserve these things merely by preserving them. We destroy unless we renew and build up as we use.

Human welfare is the first aim of conservation, and forests are vital tools in the service of mankind. Forest trees give us building materials and fuel, alcohols, rayons, sugars, turpentine and rosin, combs, perfumes, phonograph records, surgical absorbents, newsprint, fiber containers, lacquer, and thousands of other products in everyday use. Wood can be used to make artificial wool, adhesives, and food for cattle. Synthetic rubber, from by-products of wood, has long been chemically possible. What we may finally be able to make out of wood depends largely on research, invention, and development.

So, although  $1/3$  of our continental area is still in forest land, and is most valuable for forest purposes, we cannot afford to hoard our forests. Nor as a nation can we afford to exploit them, - as most owners of private forest lands still do.

In thinking about forest lands, we cannot think of them as producers of timber alone, for they serve man in many other ways. They retard too-rapid run-off of water; help control erosion and floods; conserve soil and moisture. Water from forested slopes is the lifeblood of many cultivated crops. Forest lands, on which most of our remaining big game now live, also furnish feed for domestic livestock. Forest industries still support some 6 million people. As sources for inspiration, the National Forests alone provide healthful recreation for more than 30 millions each year.

Modern agriculture has problems common to every part of the country, and to all the people in it. One concerns farm woodlands. They occupy 17% of all farm lands; furnish materials and cash to  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million farmers. A second concerns all our forest lands. They help industry and commerce as well as agriculture. A third problem has to do with forage. Range lands produce about 75% of our wool and mohair; about 55% by weight of sheep and lambs, nearly one-third the cattle and calves.

I shall report today some of the recent conservation highlights with respect to these three problems. Let me tell you first about forage.

Forage is managed as a crop on the National Forests, where it occurs in combination with timber and on higher portions of many watersheds. In certain Montana counties, a 55 million dollar investment and the livelihood of more than 5,000 people depend upon it. Twenty-six thousand livestock owners graze more than  $1\frac{1}{3}$  million cattle and horses and nearly  $5\frac{2}{3}$  million sheep on some 83 million National Forest acres. The Forest Service consults with

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members of more than 760 neighborhood stock associations before adopting new grazing policies or changing existing ones. These associations represent a really successful form of cooperative range management; one that is truly democratic.

But National Forest range can graze only about 25% of the sheep and 15% of the cattle owned by western stockmen. The rest of the herds and flocks graze on public domain or private land. To help these livestock operators practice good management, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration - under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act - has made payments available to men who use methods that conserve the soil and grass. At the request of the A.A.A., the Forest Service has examined more than 56 million acres of these range lands. We have figured grazing capacities; recommended conservation practices. Each report - a simple statement of range management needs of a ranching unit - is of immediate and direct benefit to owner and operator.

Other examples of conservation have to do with farm woodlots generally. I'll tell you something about them, and about how they help rehabilitate the Prairie Plains region.

Under a Federal law now in effect, 37,600,000 trees were produced and distributed for planting in 40 States and 2 Territories last year, and forestry specialists gave information and aid to farm woodland owners in 36 States and one Territory. A new Cooperative Farm Forestry Act directly affects woodlands owned by more than 2 1/2 million farmers. It also provides that work in the Dust Bowl comparable to the emergency Prairie States Forestry Project may be continued on a more permanent basis. Under that project, planting of 44 million trees helped establish shelterbelts and woodlands on more than 6,000 farms in the two Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, during the past 3 years.

People who own small woodlands are often at a serious economic disadvantage in managing and marketing forest products from them. Cooperative associations seem to point a way out of this difficulty. In one such association, near Cooperstown, New York, 232 small owners have joined to build up their woodlands and then harvest, process, and market their forest crops. Prospects for success look promising.

Now a word or two about forests in general, and our rural distressed regions. Forests are managed as crops on National Forests. Half the population of Flagstaff, Arizona, depends on forest products from the Coconino, and pine on the Harney, in South Dakota, contributes 20,000 man-days of work each year to a nearby but scattered population. All our National Forests now embrace more than 172 million acres. In many countries this would be an empire in itself, but in the United States more than 70% of our forest lands are privately owned. This ownership now has the best 4/5 of our commercial forest land, almost 3/5 of the remaining sawtimber. Ninety-eight percent of our forest products still come from private lands, and the nation has suffered heavily from the forest exploitation that still continues there.

Rural distressed regions - in which private forests have been mined - already include some 1,300 counties. They embrace half of all our farms; 3/5 of all farm tenants. The average farm income is low there. So are living



standards. Educational facilities are not what they should be, and undernourishment is all too common.

Sixty percent of the land in these rural distressed regions is forest rather than plow or pasture land. Most of it has been exploited, but on most of it forests can still be rebuilt. Opportunities for early returns vary from locality to locality, but rebuilt forests will ultimately produce continuous forest crops - and more nearly normal standards of living. And rebuilding is worth-while work. Publicly financed, it can replace a publicly-financed dole.

I have said that a major aim of the Forest Service is to help conserve human as well as forest resources. Some of the distressed rural areas I have just mentioned are within National Forest purchase units. In one, on the Piedmont Plateau, the Forest Service - cooperating with State, county, and other agencies - is working out methods that will enable people to stay where they are and earn decent livings there. In the Appalachians another way is being tried out. Here, with funds from the former Resettlement Administration, some agricultural land has been bought, and 64 modest but modern home units completed. On a nearby National Forest, timber is being advertised for sale. The highest bidder must harvest it so the operation will continue year after year. He must also give jobs to settlers who come to these new home units on a basis of voluntary applications. There is a somewhat similar forest community in the Lake States.

Experiences and results from these forest communities will be a guide to programs to assist people in other distressed rural regions in the National Forest system. This will help, but it will not solve the larger situation. Not all rural distressed regions can be included in National Forests, and even with State and Federal assistance, private initiative has failed to substitute cropping for forest exploitation on privately owned forest lands generally. Communities are still left stranded after forest lands are wrecked. Cities are flooded still, and farms are eroded.

In face of this record it seems that something more than has yet been attempted is needed now. With a crop that matures as slowly as trees do, perhaps the time has come for us to exercise a margin of public sovereignty over private forest lands. In the old world, public regulation is the force that really safeguards both the public as well as those private owners who need protection from others who without public regulation would continue unfair competition through forest exploitation. Yet before we apply public regulation to private forest lands we should, I believe, provide for such things as local representation and appeals; clearly adapt our measures to the institutions and traditions of our own country.

I hope these few highlights of forest conservation will help fix in your minds the fact that human welfare is the first aim of forest conservation, that forests are vital tools in the service of mankind, and that if our natural resources are to serve "the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run", we must build them up and renew them as we use them.

